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BOOK REVIEWS

Primitive Paternity, the Myth of Supernatural Birth in relation to the History of the Family. BY EDWIN SIDNEY HARTLAND. Vol. I (1909), pp. viii+325; vol. II (1910), pp. 328.

British anthropologists write so much and so well, that we, their American colleagues, are kept busy reviewing them. When the author of *The Legend of Perseus*, one who as folklorist and totemist ranks among the first, writes a book on *Primitive Paternity*, our attention is aroused and our anticipation kindled.

The author opens his argument by presenting a well-selected set of myths of supernatural birth, *i. e.*, of "birth without sexual intercourse, and as the result of impregnation by means which we now know to be impossible" (I, p. 2). We read stories of impregnation by eating and drinking; of conception through stones or the consumption of a portion of a corpse; of children born from the wind, the rain, or the rays of the sun, etc. Having tasted of legend and myth, we follow the author through a maze of picturesque customs and beliefs which indicate that mythological fancy became reality in the innumerable devices for artificial impregnation which have been used in antiquity and continue to be used by modern savages and peasants (I, pp. 30-155).

The beliefs in supernatural birth or asexual conception are so widespread that they must evidently have existed from the remotest antiquity and must have sprung from some basic characteristic of primitive mentality. This the author finds in the primitive view of nature in which no sharp line was drawn between man, animal, plant, and stone, and transformations from one natural kingdom to another were of every day occurrence. Ninety-seven pages are devoted to a discussion of such beliefs in transformation, where, through death and rebirth or in some other way, man becomes an animal, stone, or plant, or *vice versa*.

Here the argument takes an unexpected turn, and we find ourselves confronted with the problem of mother-right. "During many ages" says Hartland, "the social organization of mankind would not have necessitated the concentration of thought on the problem of paternity" (I, p. 256). Such a type of social organization is found in mother-right, a state of society which must once have been universal for "the result of anthropological investigations during the past half century has been

to show that mother-right everywhere preceded father-right and the reckoning of descent in the modern civilized fashion through both parents" (I, pp. 256-257).

In the course of his characterization of the social conditions of mother-right the author lays some stress on the belief in blood-kinship between the members of the matriarchal clan, based on real or imaginary descent or, in later periods, acquired through an artificial rite of adoption into the clan. The importance of the bond of blood, female descent, and the usual concomitant, exogamy, bring it about that the father is not recognized as belonging to the kin of his children and, consequently, small account is taken of him in the life of the family (I, pp. 261-2). Further, the children of the same father but different mothers are not reckoned as brothers and sisters (I, p. 264). In case of strife between clans, children may take up arms against their father (I, p. 269). When a crime is perpetrated on a woman or other injustice is done her, the duty of assistance or revenge does not fall on her husband but on her blood-relations (I, pp. 273 *sq.*). The wife's brother has far more authority over her children than has their own father (I, pp. 285 *sq.*). Having thus sketched the social organization of mother-right, the author vigorously repudiates the oft made conjecture that the practice of counting descent through the mother is due to uncertainty of paternity. He takes pains to show that "mother-right then is found not merely where paternity is uncertain, but also where it is practically certain. Father-right on the other hand is found not merely where paternity is certain, but also where it is uncertain and even where the legal father is known not to have begotten the children" (I, p. 325). Needless to say, all of the above propositions are substantiated by a long list of ethnographic examples (I, pp. 253-325).

In the pages that follow the author attempts to trace in a general way the rise of father-right. At first the husband resides in the wife's family or visits her secretly. When the wife's relatives become more particular as to the parentage of the children, the husband's visits must be tacitly approved by the relatives of the couple, although formal secrecy may still be maintained. Gradually the husband tends to become the head of the household, and begins to remove the wife to his home. The removal of the wife to the husband's home is one of the important factors in the rise of father-right. As the practice becomes perpetuated a feeling of solidarity and strength arises between the males of the local group; the son is less willing to raise his arm against the father in protection of his mother's interests (II, p. 97). Another factor is the

breaking up of large groups into smaller units with strong males as heads and protectors (II, pp. 94-95). Under mother-right, children are, on the death of the father, deprived of the advantages derived during his lifetime from sharing in his material possessions. With the rise of economic values, children become less willing to submit to these drawbacks of their maternal affiliations, and in this they are supported by the growing desire on the part of the father to provide for the perpetuation of his hearth (II, p. 98).

Among peoples who count descent through the father we often find customs which can be interpreted only as survivals from an earlier stage of mother-right. The bride may be temporarily retained at her parents' home (II, pp. 15, 16, 55, 56); or she may follow her husband to his house but return to her parents and invite him to visit her (II, p. 21); finally, the young man, before he is permitted to marry, may be required to spend a period of probation at the house of his future father-in-law, assisting him in his work or simply courting the bride-to-be (II, p. 48); etc.

Thus the author arrives at the conclusion that father-right is not, like mother-right, a natural system based on blood relationship, but a social convention, which is rooted in specific social and economic conditions (II, pp. 1-100). In this, as in previous chapters, numerous examples are adduced, to substantiate the argument.

In the following chapter, the longest in the book (II, p. 101-248), the author undertakes an extended examination of the sexual relations of primitive peoples, in the attempt to further justify his contention that father-right "has in its origin at all events, nothing whatever to do with the consciousness of blood relationship" (II, p. 101). The author's principal positions are the following. Among primitive peoples sexual laxity of both sexes is common; promiscuous sexual intercourse is indulged in by unmarried girls and, to a somewhat lesser extent, by married women; female chastity is not valued; in fact, an impressive love-record is often put to the credit of the girl or the married woman; jealousy, in our sense, can scarcely be said to exist; if it appears at all it is based rather on property rights than on any sentimental considerations; actual paternity is a matter of indifference; such indifference is fostered, in many instances, by a dominant desire for children which furthers the development of fictitious parenthood. This brings us to the final summing up. "Thus father-right, far from being founded on certainty of paternity, positively fosters indifference, and if it does not promote fraud at least becomes a hotbed of legal fictions. It is a purely artificial system" (II, p. 248).

Correlating the facts disclosed in the last chapter with the beliefs in extra-sexual conception dwelt on in the opening sections of the book, the author concludes "that not merely is actual paternity of small account but, strange as it may seem, it is even not understood" (II, p. 250). And again "What I do mean is that for generations and æons the truth that a child is only born in consequence of an act of sexual union, that the birth of a child is the natural consequence of such an act performed in favouring circumstances, and that every child must be the result of such an act and of no other cause, was not realized by mankind, that down to the present day it is imperfectly realized by some peoples, and there are still others among whom it is unknown" (II, p. 250). Indeed, many causes may be adduced why the discovery of the natural order of things should have been retarded. In primitive conditions all women are accustomed to sexual intercourse from an early age but not all women bear children (II, p. 253). Premature intercourse or intercourse at an age past child-bearing is not followed by child birth (II, pp. 253-272), etc. When finally the true cause of birth was discovered, beliefs in the efficiency of other means of impregnation lingered on among many peoples (II, p. 274). The familiar Australian evidence on "ignorance of conception" is here adduced, followed by one or two instances from other tribes (II, pp. 274-281).

We need not with the author recapitulate his argument. It is hardly necessary to add that *Primitive Paternity* makes throughout interesting and instructive reading, and is written in a style that is rich and pleasing; while the author's eccentricities in punctuation are always amusing though at times puzzling. But what as to his argument and conclusions?

To begin at the end. When, in the last chapter of the book, the author makes the statement that at one time all mankind was ignorant of the true nature of conception, one can not but agree with him. The proposition is indeed obvious and must be accepted even without hundreds of pages of evidence. But the crucial question clearly is: Would the generalization apply to savages as we know them, from ancient and modern descriptions? No proof is offered that it would. The evidence as to tribes now living is very scanty indeed. Perhaps the Australian facts may be accepted, with some reservations, for in Central Australia, at least, as Andrew Lang and others have argued, the beliefs in spiritual conception are clearly a late development superseding an earlier condition when, for all we know, there were no such beliefs. As to the other evidence, that of the Seri and the Ewhe, for instance (II, p. 279), its more

than doubtful character is too obvious for specific criticism. What is true of modern savages, seems also to apply to those peoples in whose midst sprang up the myths of supernatural birth, and who, like so many of their successors up to the present time, believed in and practiced many devices for asexual impregnation.

It is not at all obvious that such customs and myths are based on an ignorance of the natural connection between the sexual act and conception. These myths and customs are rooted in the belief in magical power, which, in its turn, is correlated with the absence of a view of nature as a nexus of uniform causal relations (as the author also points out). A child may be produced in the normal way, but there are also many other means to the end. The savage builds his hut or canoe and is perfectly familiar with the processes involved, but this does not prevent him from believing that the hut or canoe may arise out of nothing, by the power of magic. In many cases cited by the author there seems to be no need of postulating a belief in asexual impregnation; for instance, in the customs connected with fruit having two kernels, double ears of maize, etc. (I, p. 37). But, however that may be, the facts adduced in the first two and the last chapters of the book do not prove that the peoples who practiced the customs and invented the myths were any more ignorant of the physiology of conception than they were of other natural processes. Such ignorance must have been a fact in the times of remotest antiquity, in the childhood of man; but of those times we know nothing. If that is so, we are no longer justified in connecting the ideas underlying the myths and customs with mother-right, or any other known form of social organization.

I have briefly outlined what the author has to say about mother-right itself. To quote him again: "The result of anthropological investigations during the past half-century has been to show that mother-right everywhere preceded father-right and the reckoning of descent in the modern civilized fashion through both parents" (I, pp. 256-7). The existence of tribes with paternal descent but without any traces of former maternal reckoning does not shake the author's confidence; he asserts, in fact, that such cases can not even shift the burden of proof. What about Starcke, Grosse, Westermarck, Graebner, Cunow (see *Le Devenir Social*, vol. IV), Swanton? Or does he mean historical evidence? Where is it? The question is certainly an open one but up to the present neither facts nor logic justify the assumption of either the former universality of mother-right or its priority to father-right. The problem is of such vast importance that I feel justified in dwelling on it for a

moment. If maternal descent has always arisen under more primitive conditions than paternal descent, we should expect to find some correlation between higher culture and paternal tribes, lower culture and maternal tribes. In North America, to take a conspicuous example, we find no such correlation. The reverse, in fact, is true. The two groups of tribes whose culture ranks among the highest of the continent, the Indians of the North West Coast and the Iroquois, count descent through the mother. The Eskimo, on the other hand, the Northern Athapaskan (excepting those affected by the culture of the coast), the Interior and part of the Coast Salish, the tribes of Washington and Oregon, the Shoshone—all tribes of a relatively low culture—are either paternal or reckon "descent in the modern civilized fashion through both parents." Some African data are highly suggestive in this connection. Among the Herero, the Bawili, the Tshi, and probably some other tribes, the two modes of counting descent coexist; there are two sets of clans, one of which is inherited through the father, the other through the mother. Each individual belongs to one maternal and one paternal clan. Frazer and Hartland diagnose these conditions as transitional from maternal to paternal descent; but of this there is no evidence. On the contrary, the amicable coexistence of the two systems raises a strong presumption against the theory that they belong to two fundamentally different stages in the development of social organization.

When dealing with problems of descent we must always remember that in the undifferentiated social conditions of earliest society no definite ideas of descent could develop. Only as the outlines of social units—be they families, clans, or villages—become more clearly defined, may we expect to find a corresponding definiteness of customs as to descent; and, perhaps, not until the ties of clanship and the rules of exogamy lead to a sharp division between members of one household, do matters of descent loom as prominently in the consciousness of the people as is the case in many primitive communities. As to the most primitive condition referred to above, whether man then lived in families or in hordes, there can be little doubt that social, economic, and sexual pre-eminence rested with the stronger sex.

Inheritance of property, a phenomenon in many respects related to that of descent, seems to have ways of its own. The problem thus becomes very complex.

When dealing with the "Rise of Father-right" the author dwells on numerous examples of survivals from mother-right. If the assumption of the chronological formula mother-right-father-right, is rejected, these "survivals" acquire a totally different aspect.

The author admits that while there seems to be a correlation between maternal descent and the husband's residence with his parents-in-law and between paternal descent and the wife's residence with her husband (as Tylor has shown), many exceptions are found to this rule (the author refers to the Australian evidence). Nevertheless, he repeatedly represents the husband's residence with his wife as a survival from mother-right. When the husband, for a certain period after marriage, is not permitted to take the wife away and may only visit her, openly or secretly, we have another "survival." May not the customs be due, for instance, to the reluctance of the wife's relatives or clanmates, to lose a member of the local group? This would be equally plausible in father-right and in mother-right. The period of probation to which the future son-in-law is subjected (another "survival") may be explained by economic or moral considerations, or what not. Some instances cited by the author are quite puzzling. I leave it to the reader to determine, for instance, what particular customs of the Maidu (II, p. 82) may be interpreted as survivals from the stage of maternal descent. Even sexual laxity, to which so much space is devoted in the second volume, is treated as a prerogative of mother-right, although the author is forced to admit that "matrilineal freedom has often survived into father-right in more or less abundant measure" (II, pp. 136-7). If we forget for a moment that father-right is necessarily preceded by mother-right, the "survivals" become weighty arguments against the author's position. For what they show is that many traits deemed peculiar to mother-right are also found in father-right; a realization which can not but deeply affect our ideas of the social conditions accompanying the two modes of counting descent.

Having treated of mother-right with considerable care, the author has but little to say of the conditions and peculiarities of father-right. The subject can not be discussed here. We may note, however, that the institution of fictitious parenthood clearly presupposes the realization of the significance of paternity, and thus may not be used as evidence of the absence of such realization (II, p. 248).

But let us return to the subject of sexual laxity. Much could be said as to the character of the evidence used by the author, but I shall merely refer to one account, that of Monteiro (II, pp. 116-117) which may serve as a warning to the reader. But the author sins in a much more important matter. He treats of sexual looseness but he forgets to mention the stringent and multiform regulations which in primitive society restrict sexual intercourse and direct the selection of marriage mates. This is indeed a strange omission. He might as well describe modern

society and omit to mention legalized monogamous marriage. It is true enough in primitive society that absolute physiological chastity is but seldom sought or valued. But this is a matter of point of view, in which even modern civilization can boast but of one-sided progress. If, on the other hand, we juxtapose the sum total of legitimate to that of illegitimate sexual intercourse among ourselves and in primitive communities, the comparison may prove favorable to the latter. Just *what* is sanctioned by public opinion is, of course, an important question, but it is not the whole question.

Very much the same criticism may be passed on the author's method of dealing with sexual jealousy. Any one acquainted with ethnographic literature (Mr Hartland not excepted) knows that there is plenty of direct evidence of the existence of that passion among primitive men. On the other hand, we might vastly extend the author's list of cases where the savage exhibits no jealousy in situations where to us such exhibition seems natural and imperative. The explanation clearly lies in habits of inhibition which, beginning in childhood, become fixed early in life. This proposition does not require any proof; however, the subject has been nicely elaborated by Jochelson and Sternberg in their treatises on the peoples of eastern Siberia.

The book is laid aside with a sense of keen disappointment. It does not bring the solution of the problems discussed nor does it indicate the direction for further research. In fact, we can not endorse any of the author's conclusions, with one exception, namely, that mother-right is not based on the uncertainty of paternity (I, 325). Ignorance of the physiology of conception no doubt once pervaded mankind; but no proof is forthcoming that such was the case in a state of society at all comparable to that found among primitive peoples we know. Hence the association of that remote state with mother-right is quite artificial. The author's characterization of the social conditions of mother-right, especially in connection with sexual relations, is vitiated by his assumption that mother-right always preceded father-right; hence, conditions which are common to society under both modes of counting descent are by him ascribed to mother-right only, and, if found in father-right, are treated as survivals. The assumption itself of the universality and priority of mother-right, does not by any means represent, as the author would have us believe, the last word of anthropological science. Father-right is disposed of with strange superficiality, while the artificial and conventional character claimed for that system remains unproven.

The cause of the author's failure lies in the fact that he kept aloof

from the historical point of view which is beginning to revolutionize the methods of ethnological inquiries. We want a systematic account of the actual distribution of father-right and mother-right. We should like to know the social characteristics of the two systems as found in concrete cultural areas. We may still be able to ascertain some of the historical processes which accompany or determine variations or radical changes in the mode of reckoning descent. Our knowledge of the regulations of marriage and sexual intercourse, in all their manifoldness, is limited indeed; while scarcely any analysis of the psychological basis of these regulations has as yet been attempted. The subject of systems of relationship, in its conceptual as well as in its terminological aspects, is coming to the fore again, and awaits systematic treatment (the author, by the way, merely hints at it). In vain would we look in Hartland's work for research in any of these directions. Instead, he tries to solve complex problems of social organization and development with nought but loose psychological generalizations to start from—absence of jealousy, indifference of paternity, ignorance of physiological conception—generalizations supported by an incoherent mass of ethnographic material.

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The Prehistoric Ethnology of a Kentucky Site. By HARLAN I. SMITH. Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History. Vol. 4 part 2. New York: Published by the Museum, 1910.

It is well understood among archeologists of the present time that the important unsolved problems of aboriginal man in America are those of race origins, of culture origins, and of chronology, and the author by this contribution has paved the way to the study of these problems by working out the culture history of this particular prehistoric Kentucky site and comparing the results with known and similar culture sites in Ohio, thus furnishing a vast amount of interesting and valuable data concerning the past of this barbarian culture.

The trained archeologist snatches every thread of evidence that leaves its trace in material form, and the author has shown his training along this line by discussing at length the "Resources in Animal and Plant Material" taken from the Kentucky village and making a comparison of the finds with the villages in Ohio. The comparison shows the gray fox absent, but in its stead the red fox. The red fox was not found at either the Baum or Gartner village sites, but the gray fox was very abundant. The only domestic animal known to prehistoric man in Ohio, namely the Indian dog, was also absent from the Kentucky site.